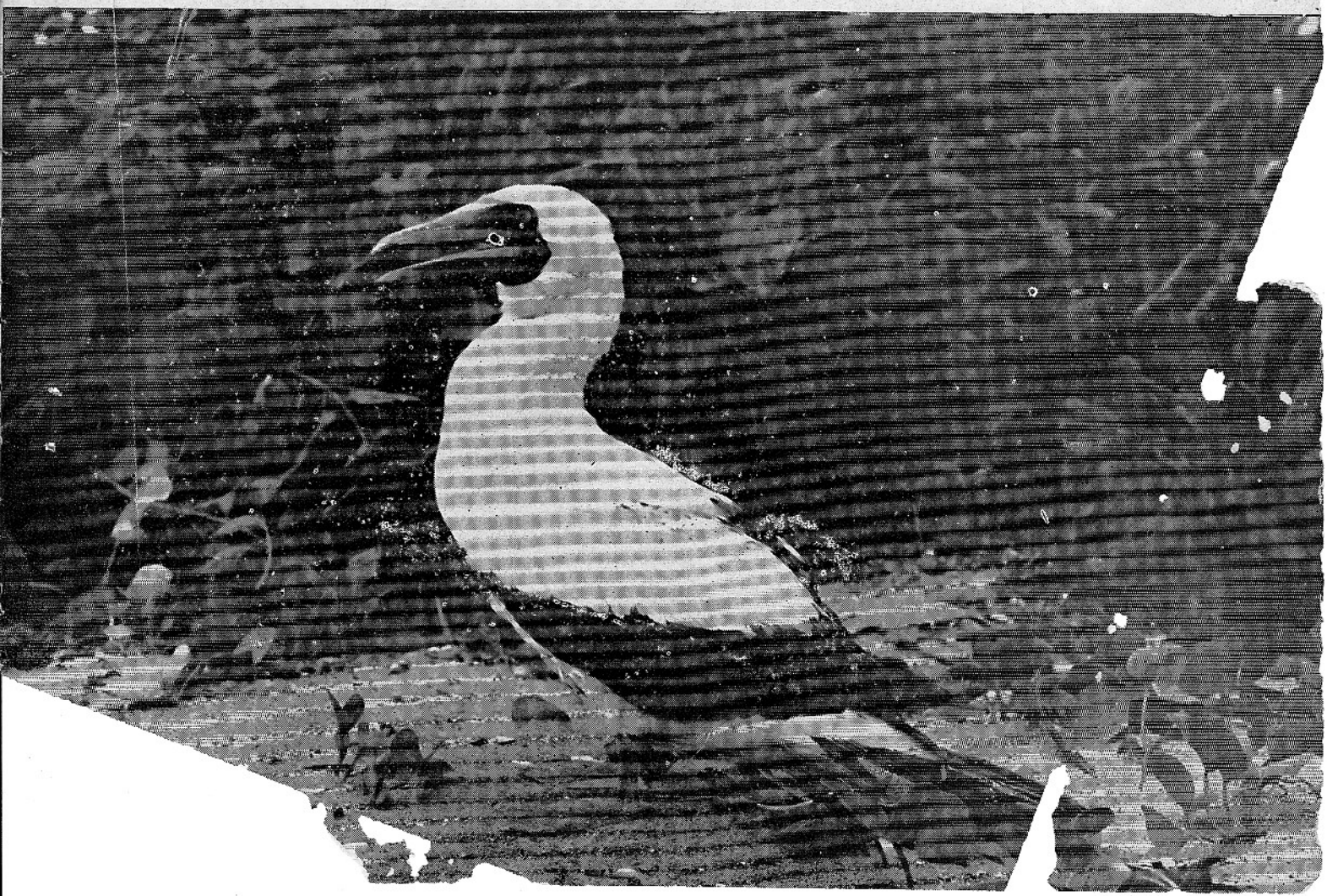
Newsletter for Birdwatchers

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N E W S L E T T E R

F O R B I R D W A T C H E R S

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A Talk with Salim Ali about where do we go from here:

During a recent meeting with Salim Ali I discussed the kind of projects which Members of our Newsletter could undertake. Many of our readers have now become competent in identifying species. This of course is the first step, and Salim Ali suggested that the following aspects of bird life could now be studied.

1. Pollination of Flowers

This is a fascinating subject and the Institute of Paleobotany in Lucknow could be contacted for identification of pollen to find out which species of flowers are involved. Some birds are very specific in this matter. Some flowers can only be pollinated by a few species of birds.

2. The Food of Birds

For this it is necessary to kill and dissect birds, but even if this is not desirable, careful observation can provide an answer to what the bird is feeding on, particularly during the nesting stage.

3. Condition of Habitat

Careful daily notes about bird species seen, and changes in the habitat over a period of time, can result in very worthwhile findings. Speaking about Pali Hill, Salim Ali said that there used to be a large number of white browed bulbuls in the early fifties and sixties. But with the increase of urbanization these bulbuls were one of the first to disappear, while some other species, like magpie robbins for example, continue to survive.

4. Memory Untrustworthy

Do not trust memory, but take notes on the spot. Salim Ali recounted an interesting example of how useful careful note taking can be. In a recent visit to Simlipal in Orissa with Dillon Ripley, both of them were rather surprised at the poor population of birds, and Ripley thought that he could write a note about it based on his suspicion of deteriorating ecological condition being the main factor. However, when Salim Ali checked up his notes about the area, he found that he had specifically made a mention of its poor bird life even several decades ago. If this note had not been available, Ripley might have been tempted to produce an explanation for the alleged depletion.

Salim Ali is particularly anxious to impress on all birdwarchers the importance of integrity. A statement made on the basis of inadequate observation can lead to very misleading results. He referred to the instance of a grey tit being 'sighted' by Dr.Suffern the Assistant Editor of Lancet, the prestigious journal published in England. Suffern was in the Air-Force during the war and was stationed at Chembur. One day he reported the 'sighting' of a grey tit in the locality. Salim was very surprised because he was familiar with the area and had never seen a grey tit in Chembur. Dr.Suffern, however insisted that the bird was a grey tit. But after two months he came back to Salim and confessed that the bird was not a grey tit, but an iora. The confusion was caused by the fact that in England the grey tit during the breeding season has yellow under parts just like our ioras.

So, if we have to take a step forward and graduate from bird watchers to ornithologists, we must commence taking careful on the spot notes of what we observe. A good idea is to have a bird ledger, one page for each species, with the following headings as in the Handbook of British Birds by K.H.F. Witherby and others.

Habitat
Field Character and General Habits
Voice
Display and Posturing
Breeding
Food
Distribution
Migration
Distribution Abroad
Description - adult winter
Summer - nestling - juvenile
First winter and summer, measurements
Characters and forms
Hybrids

There is much to be learnt about the life histories even of our commonest birds. Some years ago when Leslie brown was working on birds of prey he wrote: 'I cannot find anywhere a properly detailed account of the nesting of that common bird the Brahminy Kite, though my scant observations have indicated that only the female incubates, and that she is fed on the nest by the male'. Will some of our readers take up a study of the Brahminy kite?

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Birdwatching in Goa by S.Rangaswami and Hari Vivek:

A word about us at the outset may not be out of place. We are a grandfather - grandson team and together we have done many hours of enjoyable and educative bird-watching in places like Rishi Valley (1976-77), in and around Erandwana, Pune (1978-80), Gulbarga (1981) and Goa (1982-86). During the last four years and more, during Feb/March, we have done quite a bit of serious and sustained birdwatching in Goa's Pythona village located in Parvorim area, about a kilometre from Defence Colony. We chose this area for our bird studies not only due to its proximity to our house but also to the ideal forest habitat that the village has. We knew that our joint outings this year would be the last in Goa. So we decided to do some strenuous observation in the densely wooded area of Pythona village. This we did on 22nd, 23rd and 25th Feb. 1986 from 6.30 am to 11.oo am. We had with us our Canon Binoculars (7x50) and the 'Pictorial Guide' (BNHS Centenary Pubn.).

Pythona village has forest coverage to the extent of about 4 sq.km. (or a little less) and the terrain is very uneven with many crests and troughs. It is sparsely populated. So human intrusion is minimal. It has all the characteristics of tropical rain forests. There are trees in plenty -- big and small, deciduous and ever-green with some giants here and there towering above the rest, but all of them providing a pleasing and continuous canopy of foliage and also flowers and fruits according to the season. As could be expected, a good many trees are buttressed and festooned with lianas and overgrowths like clumps of Loranthus and other epiphytes are found in profusion. Among the trees we could identify teak, santalum, jack (heavy with fruits all over), jamun, varieties of ficus with plenty of small, succulent berries, the most conspicuous of all being silk-cotton (both Salmalia and Bombax) and Coral trees (Erythrina). These trees were providing an assemblage point for a multitude of nectar feeders since they were all in bloom. To add to this arboreal luxuriance we have all over the jungle dense undergrowth of bushes almost impenetrable in some places. Human intrusion is confined to the cashew plantations that girdle the forest all round to a depth of 20 to 30 metres. For avid and ardent bird-watchers there cannot be a more promising location for feasting their eyes and ears with the enthralling beauty that the avifauna of Pythona village offers. As a whole this particular pocket of forest land does not

seem to have undergone any serious habitat disturbance during the last several decades. It is little wonder that Pythona village teems with bird life, its natural forest serving as a focal point for several species of birds and offering them plentiful supply of food all the year round in the form of fruits, seeds, insects and nectar.

The first avian friends to greet us were two pale brown shrikes and two white cheeked bulbuls from their perch on telegraph wires. As we entered the jungle at 6.30 am on 22 Feb. we heard the noisy reverberations of the full throated, persistent K-U-T-R-O-O calls of large green barbets coming from all directions and the noisy cackle of the white browed bulbuls coming from the bushes close by. For about 45 minutes we kept a watch on the behaviour of the birds which had thronged the cluster of silk-cotton and coral trees some 50 ft. away. There were dozens of crows making crude attempts to get at the nectar of the flowers and our discomfiture was ended only when dozens of black drongos descended on these trees and chased the crows away as if to warn them that with their undiscriminating taste for all kinds of food, from the purest to the most putrid, they could go to the carbage of Goa leaving the nectar to the birds which know the value of nectare and have a preference for it. Two pairs of crimson breasted barbets also joined and confined themselves to the periphery. One of the pairs found the location more congenial for mating than for foraging. The male would fly some distance, return with tiny figs in his beak, thrust it into the mouth of his partner and mount her. The understanding among the partners appeared perfect. No other bird had the temerity to come near the coral and silk-cotton trees so long as the drongos were there. But as soon as they left, flocks of rosy pastors congregated and messed up the flowers while drinking the nectar. A good many babblers, mostly of the rufous variety, red-vented bulbuls and red-cheeked bulbuls also joined the fray. The calls of the bulbuls got drowned in the noise and din that prevailed and by now all the flowers must have been sucked dry of their nectar. Two magpie robins came and left soon, finding the atmosphere uncongenial. Above us, we could see green bee-eaters making sallies in the air and catching their victims in flight. A group of little egrets flew past far above with pursuits of their own in haunts totally different. It was nearing 8 am and we thought it was time we moved to some other spot.

Just then we found some peculiar bird-movement in the interior of the dense mass of scrub made up of lantana, carissa and zizyphus bushes interspersed with creepers affecting visibility. We spotted a biggish bird a little bigger than mynah, flitting about silently and sulkingly as if it preferred concealment. It appeared very much like a coucal in form as well as movements and was of dull green plumage with a bright green beak and what was more arresting, a distinct, circular, white band round the iris. The tail feathers were long like those of a coucal and were white tipped. The bird made no calls and was single. For a while we could observe him more minutely through our binoculars. But it vanished soon. Since we had not seen the like of such a bird before we glanced through the pages of the Pictorial Guide and got the clue that it could be the small greenbilled malkoha (Plate 52). Reference to the Handbook later confirmed this (Entry No.595). We hope we are right. We moved a little to the interior of the forest and came to a spot which was like the bottom of a trough about 40 ft. deep and 80 ft. wide, surrounded as it was by long stretches of sloping, heavily wooded terrain. A well in a state of disuse had water hardly six feet below. The bushy undergrowth was varied and of rich green. The usual coral and silk-cotton trees were there. But there were also some varieties of ficus and these were centres of attraction for all varieties of bulbuls - redvented, white cheeked and red-whiskered, coppersmiths, orioles and two pairs of Jerdon's Chloropsis. Troops of 'Sisterhoods' -- the babblers were all over the place and we could spot three distinct species -- the Rufous babbler, large grey babbler and the common babbler. But one thing that struck us most was the very large number of drongos, both black and white-bellied, we saw here and the confident airs they were assuming keeping the entire area resonant with their varied notes. It became evident that this was drongo territory. It was nearing 10.30 am and the sun was getting fierce. So we called it a day and returned home with the idea of returning to this very spot early next mornining because of the promise it held for us, specially for feasting our ears with the fine and varied melodies the air of the place was charged with. While walking back we heard the repeated calls of the golden-backed woodpecker and the tree-pie -- a strange blend of the musical and the harsh -- and this further strengthened our desire to get back to this lovely spot in which the drongos appeared to predominate and seemed not only to tolerate but also enjoy the company of several other varieties of birds. Fine co-existence indeed!

On 25 Feb we returned to this spot before 7.00 am and had come prepared with snacks and tea so that we could stay for a little longer. A magpie-robin perched right on top of a tall coral tree was pouring forth sweet and shrill notes as if to prove his skill and creativity. To our utter delight we spotted three racket-tailed drongos in another coral tree nearby, sucking nectar from the flowers which had just blossomed. They would bend down in the process and at such moments their wire like extensions of the marginal tail feathers ending in racket-like designs were clearly visible and it was a beautiful sight which will linger long in our memory. We heard no calls from them. But they remained at this spot for very nearly half an hour exhibiting their special charm which was further enhanced by the gloss of their plumage as the morning sun's rays fell on them. We realized how very apt it is on the part of the authors of Mitchell Beazley's 'The World Atlas of Birds' when they brand the racket-tailed drongo as 'a true exhibitionist'. This very same book also speaks of the association between these birds and other birds like the tree-pie, the woodpecker etc. For some time we could not spot any of these and were hearing only their calls every now and then. After closely following the direction of the call we could see the woodpecker for a few seconds. It appeared quite a restless bird. The tree-pie eluded us all the time. There were many other birds of equally arresting beauty close by and we could follow their movements and hear their calls. Two pairs of golden orioles, one blackheaded oriole, three coppersmiths, the magpie robin already spoken of, any number of black and white bellied drongos, purple and purple rumped sun birds, two pairs of Chloropsis, a few Ioras - all these birds we could see flitting or darting about actively but confining themselves to this area only and were singing all the while, as if taking part in a grand orchestra. Now and then a few unmelodious sounds could also be heard like the tooting of the large green barbets or the shrieks of a shikra. Small flocks of blossom headed as well as roseringed parakeets would fly in, settle down for a while and take to flight.

Reluctantly we moved to the outskirts of the forest to spot some more birds in the scrub jungle which appeared to be full of moths and bees and beetles. A gentle tug at one of the lianas brought down a shower of red ants and we had to jump off to a aafter spot. Here we saw one sub-adult male Paradise fly catcher flitting about to catch his prey. He had a fairly long rufous tail and

was yet to go through the final moult to transform himself in appearance and gain his adult grandeur with shiny white plumage and long streamers. We were sure that his partner was around since we could hear its unmusical, short squeaks. But we failed to locate her. Many babblers were rummaging among heaps of dry leaves and kept up a continual low chatter and the insects that took to air on being disturbed by the babblers served as ideal targets for the male flycatcher and a few drongos nearby. A pair of small minivets could be seen hopping from branch to branch a few feet away. We missed on all the three days the Malabar whistling thrush a pair of which we had seen on many earlier occasions and had heard their shrill, sweet whistle notes.

Thus ended our birdwatching session -- our last in Goa -- and the most profitable session we have had so far and also the most memorable.

A check-list of the birds mentioned in this article is given below in alphabetical order with their scientific names:

1. Babbler-Rufus	Turdoides subrufus
2. Babbler-Jungle	Turdoides straitus
3. Babbler-Common	Turdoides caudatus
4. Barbet Large green	Megalaima zeylanica
5. Barbet crimson breasted	Megalaima haemacephala
6. Bee-eater-common	Merops orientalis
7. Bulbul redvented	Pycnonotus cafer
8. Bulbul red whiskered	Pycnonotus jocosus
9. Bulbul white cheeked	Pycnonotus leucogenys
10. Bulbul white browed	Pycnonotus luteolus
11. Chloropsis - Jerdon's	Chloropsis cochinchinensis
12. Crows - jungle	Corvus macrorhynus
13. Drongo black	Dicruvus adsimilis
14. Drongo white bellied	Dicruvus caerulescens
15. Drongo greater racket tailed	-do- paradiseus
16. Egret little	Egretta garzetta
17. Flycatcher paradise	Terpsiphone paradisi
18. Iora common	Aegithina tiphia
19. Magpie robin	Copsychus saularis
20. Malkoha small green billed	Rhopodytes viridiostris
21. Minivet small	Pericrocotus cinnamomeus
22. Oriole black-headed	Oriolus xanthornus
23. -do- golden	-do- oriolus
24. Parakeet rose ringed	Psittacula krameri

25. Parakeet blossom headed	Psittacula cyanocephala
26. Rosy pastor	Sturnus roseus
27. Shrike Plae brown	Lanius isabellinus
28. Sunbird purple	Nectarina asiatica
29. Sunbird purple rumped	Nectarina zeylonica
30. Tree pie Indian	Dendrocitta vagabunda
31. Woodpecker Golden backed	Dinopium javanense

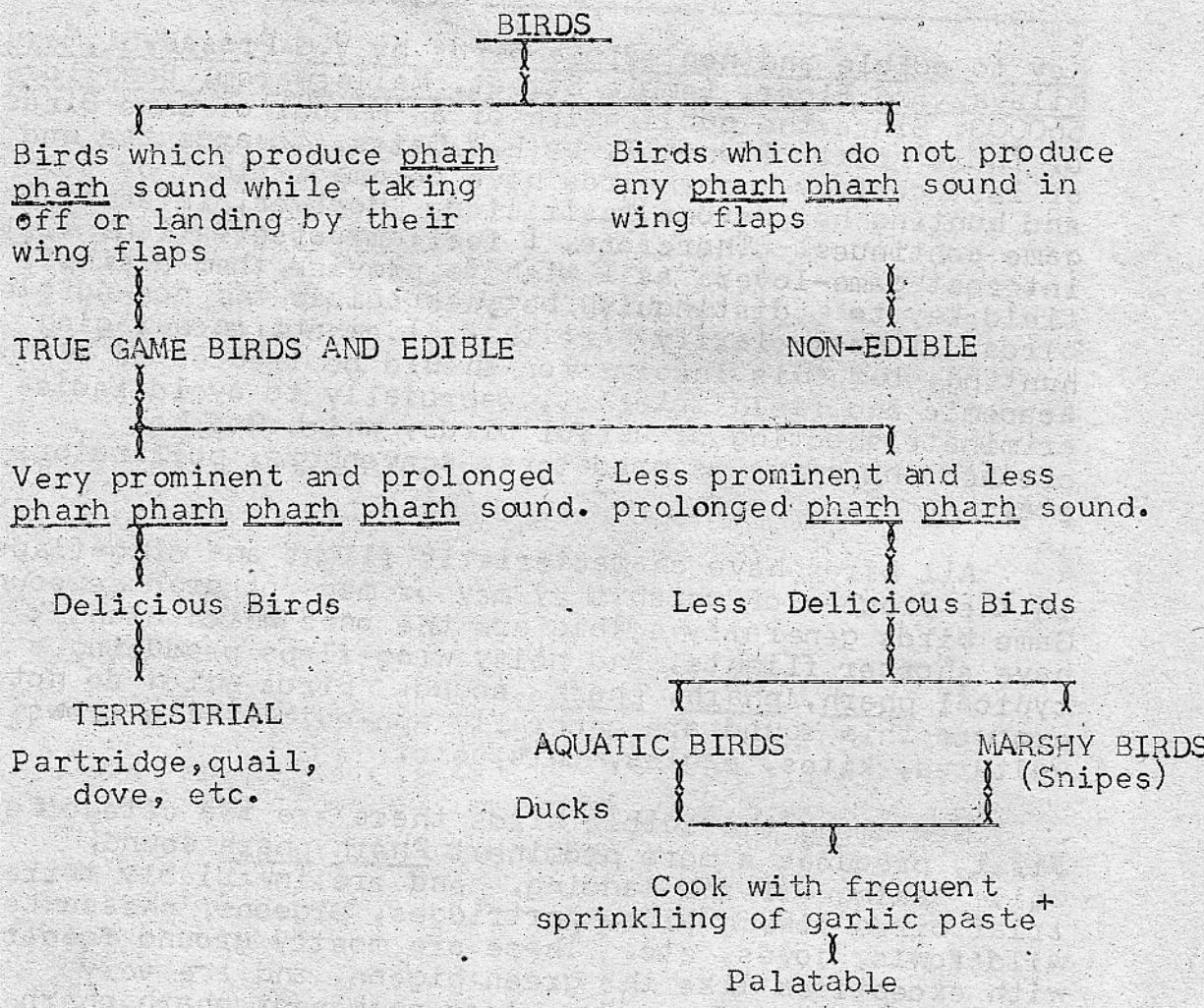
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Key to edible and non edible birds by V.G.Prasad,51,Maruthi Nilaya, 3rd Floor, Temple Street, Malleswaram, Bangalore 560003: Since the publication of a 'Manual of Game Birds of India' parts I and II, by E.W.Oates, towards the end of last century, many birds have become extinct or rare and hunting has become restricted. However, interest in game continues. Therefore, I feel, my observations will interest game-lovers as I wish to provide them a simple field key to distinguish between edible and non-edible birds. I must clarify here that, I am not encouraging hunting, but this information should be treated as of academic and field interest, especially to avoid indiscriminate shooting of useful birds, which God has created and serve as predators, scavengers, pollinators etc.

All birds have characteristic flight and wing-flaps, in the process of which they may or may not produce sounds. Game birds generally edible are the ones which usually have shorter flights, and noisy wing-flaps producing a typical pharh, pharh, pharh sound. Birds which do not produce this sound are generally non-edible like crows, vultures, kites, eagles, owls, etc.

Now among the edible birds there are two categories: First, produces a more prominent Pharh pharh sound, while taking off and landing, and are invariably terrestrial birds like quails, partridges, pigeons, pheasants, wild fowls, doves, etc. These are mostly ground feeders with exceptions like the green pigeon, and are very delicious. Second, produce less prominent pharh pharh sound, and are invariably aquatic birds like ducks, teals, snipes and other water fowls. These are relatively less delicious, but can be made more palatable by roasting it in cooking oil with frequent sprinkling of watery garlic paste to remove their undesirable smell (heek) and then cooking it with onion and masala.

Based on the observations stated above, it is now possible to generally distinguish between edible and non-edible birds at a field level and this is summarized below:



+Details given in the text

Bird edibility in a true sense, or from game point of view is neither a matter of choice nor taste, but the convention is well established all over the world since time immemorial but it needed an explaination as to how to distinguish, at a field level edible from non-edible birds. There may be some exceptions to this general rule, I am propounding, on account of many factors, including the eating of certain birds like crows, parakeets, sparrows, etc. due to a regional trait, or more out of

necessity or poverty. I have written this article not to encourage hunting but for the sake of telling your readers that a possibility exists to have a small field key drawn out for game birds. As I have not come across any such key in literature, I hope this will be much of interest and of practical value to avoid indiscriminate shooting of birds as these are part of our society to play an important role in the environment.

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An unusual nest site for the large pied wagtail by Douglas A.Bell, Museum of Vertebrate Zoology and Dept.of Zoology, University of California, Berkeley, California USA 94720: The following account of what might be an unusual nest site for the large pied wagtail Motacilla maderaspatensis is presented in the hope that it may help to further clarify nesting requirements in this species.

On April 25, 1982 a nest of Motacilla maderaspatensis containing 3 nearly-fledged young was located underneath a small water tank on the roof of a 3-story residential house in Besant Nagar, Madras. The water tank was entirely enclosed except for an overflow pipe which opened onto an outer wall of the house at a point just below the roof. All other houses in the residential neighbourhood had similar rooftop, enclosed water tanks. The nearest open fresh water source was a tank located at least 0.7 km away. The only source of fresh water in the immediate vicinity of the nest then, was the water supplied by the overflow pipe. Overflowing occurred about twice a day and lasted at most a couple of minutes each time. Other tanks in the neighbourhood overflowed at about the same rate. Overflowing water from the tanks did not collect into puddles on the ground, but instead seeped immediately into sandy soil.

The adults were often observed foraging on lawns and rooftops about the house. Foraging did not seem to coincide with overflowing water tanks, nor did the birds change any specific behaviour patterns during such overflows. Rather, they continued with the given behaviour of the moment (i.e., singing or calling by the male, preening, feeding, etc.). From the above, it appeared that the birds were not directly using tank overflows for foraging.

It has generally been assumed that the large pied wagtail selects nest sites in close proximity to water (see for example, Ali and Ripley, 1973). In the nesting instance reported here, direct use of the water source by the birds was not observed. However, it is possible that irregular innundation of the soil at tank overflows, watering of lawns and similar suburban activities produced a foraging arena suitable to the wagtails. In a study of food habitats in common Indian birds, Mathew, et al (1980) mentioned the large pied wagtail's foraging preference for muddy fields and wet grassy areas. The presence of an overflow pipe that provided an itinerate 'trickle' of water may have been an adequate stimulus, enticing the birds to settle on a roof top far away from any permanent water source.

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Ali, S. and S.D. Ripley (1973) Handbook of the Birds of India and Pakistan, Oxford Univ. Press, Bombay. Vol.9, pp. 296-298.

Mathew, D.N., T.C. Narendran and V.J. Zacharias (1980): A comparative study of the feeding habits of certain species of Indian birds affecting agriculture. J. Bombay nat. Hist. Soc., 75 (suppl.): 1178-1197.

Birdwatching in the Mundanthurai Wildlife Sanctuary by V.Santharam, 68(I Floor), Santhome High Road, Madras 600 028: The article on the Birds of Mundanthurai in the November-December 1985 issue of the Newsletter has brought back to mind, memories of my trip to this lovely area, last year.

We had reached Tirunelveli on 3 March, 1985 from where we took the 2 pm bus to Karaiyar. The bus dropped us at Mundanthurai, close to the Forest Rest House by about 4.30 pm, after a tiring ride. Our friends - Ravi Chellam, Justus Joshua, Wesley Sunderraj and Vickraman, students of wildlife Biology, doing research projects at the sanctuary - had made all arrangements to make our stay a comfortable and enjoyable one. We are extremely grateful to them for all the help and assistance given to us during the trip.

The next five days were devoted to birdwatching, photographing the lovely landscape around and observing nature. We also trekked up to Kanniketti, at an altitude of 2550 feet. The magnificient cottage at Kaniketti, built way back in 1914 is situated in the sylvan settings of an evergreen forest. Although sparsely furnished and devoid of electricity, water supply (the nearest water source being the Kanniketti 'odai' (stream) about 2 furlongs away) and human beings, our stay at this cottage was most enjoyable. Kanniketti can be approached by a jeep and is about 22 kms by road from Karaiyar. Alternatively, one could take a ride in a motor operated boat across the Hope Lake at Karaiyar (Upper Dam) and trek the 10 km stretch through the moist deciduous and evergreen forests. We had opted for the latter and this proved to be a right decision.

During our stay at this sanctuary, we came across several sambhar, cheetal, wild boar, Nilgiri and common langurs, ruddy mongoose and malabar giant squirells. We also came across fresh pug marks of a leopard, not far from the Rest House. But the most memorable sighting was that of the flying squirell in a fairy tale like setting. We were relaxing on the verandah of the Kaniketti cottage, watching the full moon rise over the hills on the eastern sky and the numerous fire-flies, flying about emitting a glow of light. About 150 feet or so away was a bare tree, silhouetted against the eastern sky. Our attention was dra n to this tree following some movements. With the aid of our commander torch and binoculars we could make out the outline of a squirell. Very soon the creature moved to the topmost branch and in a split second it was off, gliding across the full moon to disappear into the trees farther away!

Butterflies were seen in good numbers all over the place and at Kaniketti we came across several of the common birdwings, one of our largest and most colourful butterflies. A few flying lizards (Draco spp) were also noticed along the trunks of the trees along the road and many of them were observed displaying their bright orange throat patches. Earlier, at the Hope Lake, we managed to spot a marsh crocodile, one of the twenty four or so, that were released by the Tamil Nadu Forest Department.

The bird-life was simply terrific. In our short stay of just over five days, we were able to record about 115 species, some of them being new to me. The lovely white bellied blue flycatcher, seen against the thick green foliage in the evergreen jungle is still fresh in my memory.

We had a brief but unmistakable glimpse of a pair of brown throated spine tail swifts, flying up and down the Servalar river. On the tall trees along the banks of the same river we noticed chestnut-headed bee-eaters. One morning we came across a lovely specimen of the Rufous bellied hawk-eagle, soaring over the Tamraparani river. It gave us a good view of its black head, white breast and rufous belly. The only other time I saw this bird was in November, 1984 at Mukkali near Silent Valley. Ospreys were frequently seen over Servalar river and we had a grand view of a magnificent specimen of the black eagle from above as it sailed over a wooded valley, on our way to Kaniketti.

The sighting of the black capped Kingfishers at a check-dam at Mundanthurai and later at Hope Lake came off as a surprise since this species is known to frequent coastal areas and tidal creeks. We saw a pair of Malharbe's or large golden backed woodpeckers behind the cottage at Kaniketti. Small sunbirds were the commonest sunbirds at Kaniketti. Jerdon's imperial pigeons, Southern tree pies, Hill mynas, yellow-browed bulbuls, Malabar whistling thrushes, lorikeets and blue winged parakeets were some of the other common birds at Kaniketti. In the plateau, there were a good number of plain species including ioras, brown shrikes, whiteheaded babblers, jungle wren warblers, tailor birds etc.

During our night walks, undertaken with the hopes of spotting a leopard or some other nocturnal mammals, we heard calls of a nightjar which I have tentatively identified as that of the jungle nightjars. I happened to hear the calls later on at Chitteri in October 1985 and even saw the bird at dusk. These calls form the background sound in 'The Ganges Gharial', a film produced by the Bedi brothers, especially in the night shots. I hope readers, familiar with this species of nightjar who have seen this film, would care to confirm my identification.

I would like to conclude this note with a few additions to the list of birds prepared by Dr.Johnsingh and others. I should mention that some of these had been seen only at Kanniketti or en route.

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The bird-life was simply terrific. In our short stay of just over five days, we were able to record about 115 species, some of them being new to me. The lovely white bellied blue flycatcher, seen against the thick green foliage in the evergreen jungle is still fresh in my memory.

We had a brief but unmistakable glimpse of a pair of brown throated spine tail swifts, flying up and down the Servalar river. On the tall trees along the banks of the same river we noticed chestnut-headed bee-eaters. One morning we came across a lovely specimen of the Rufous bellied hawk-eagle, soaring over the Tamraparani river. It gave us a good view of its black head, white breast and rufous belly. The only other time I saw this bird was in November, 1984 at Mukkali near Silent Valley. Ospreys were frequently seen over Servalar river and we had a grand view of a magnificent specimen of the black eagle from above as it sailed over a wooded valley, on our way to Kaniketti.

The sighting of the black capped Kingfishers at a check-dam at Mundanthurai and later at Hope Lake came off as a surprise since this species is known to frequent coastal areas and tidal creeks. We saw a pair of Malharbe's or large golden backed woodpeckers behind the cottage at Kaniketti. Small sunbirds were the commonest sunbirds at Kaniketti. Jerdon's imperial pigeons, Southern tree pies, Hill mynas, yellow-browed bulbuls, Malabar whistling thrushes, lorikeets and blue winged parakeets were some of the other common birds at Kaniketti. In the plateau, there were a good number of plain species including ioras, brown shrikes, whiteheaded babblers, jungle wren warblers, tailor birds etc.

During our night walks, undertaken with the hopes of spotting a leopard or some other nocturnal mammals, we heard calls of a nightjar which I have tentatively identified as that of the jungle nightjars. I happened to hear the calls later on at Chitteri in October 1985 and even saw the bird at dusk. These calls form the back-ground sound in 'The Ganges Gharial', a film produced by the Bedi brothers, especially in the night shots. I hope readers, familiar with this species of nightjar who have seen this film, would care to confirm my identification.

I would like to conclude this note with a few additions to the list of birds prepared by Dr.Johnsingh and others. I should mention that some of these had been seen only at Kanniketti or en route.

1. Chestnut bittern
2. Crested Honey Buzzard
3. Rufousbellied hawk-eagle
4. Marsh harrier
5. Green Sandpiper
6. Jerdon's imperial pigeon
7. Blue winged parakeet
8. Jungle nightjar
9. Edible nest swiftlet
10. Large brown throated spine tail swift
11. Malabar trogon
12. Crimson throated barbet
13. Malherbe's golden backed woodpecker
14. Racket tailed drongo
15. Hill Mynah or grackle
16. Southern treepie
17. Small minivet
18. Goldenfronted chloropsis
19. Fairy bluebird
20. Ruby throated bulbul
21. Redwhiskered bulbul
22. Redvented bulbul
23. Rufoustailed flycatcher
24. Greenish leaf warbler
25. Malabar whistling thrush

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Correspondence

Identification of desert birds by Dr.Ashok Kumar Sharma, D-67, Swai Madho Singh Road, Bani Park, Jaipur 302006: Newsletter for Birdwatchers was good reading in 1985. In Sept.-Oct. issue of the Newsletter, I read 'Common birds of Dhawa, Jodhpur' by B.D.Ranga and R.N.Ram with great interest, as I have considerable experience of birding in the desert especially in Jhunjhunu and Churu dist. of Rajasthan. I am doubtful about the identification of jungle crow, black bird (Turdus merula) and wood pecker (Micropternus brachyurus) at Dhawa. The Authors are requested to check their identification and reconfirm their findings.

The Punjab raven is a common bird in North-Western Rajasthan and can be easily confused with the jungle crow. The Punjab raven is differentiated from the jungle crow by its larger size, typical call, wedge shaped tail while

flying and by its habit of soaring in the afternoon in the company of pariah kites and vultures. The jungle crow is slightly larger than the house crow, while the Punjab raven is about the size of a pariah kite.

Although black birds (Turdus merula) are seen at Abu, it would be a most unexpected bird in the desert because of its preference for moist deciduous forests and is not seen in the desert.

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White storks in Ahmedabad district by Rajshri Sarabhai and Lalsinh Raol: In response to the note 'White storks in Rajkot' (N.L.11 and 12, 1985) we are tempted to send our observations. Our last three years' outings show that the number of white storks (Ciconia ciconia) seem to have increased. While going to Nal Sarovar, we almost always found a good number of white storks from November on wards. Nal Sarovar is 62 km from Ahmedabad. After 20 km from Ahmedabad the road turns left at Sanand, a town on the Ahmedabad-Viramgam Road. No white stork was ever spotted by us upto Sanand. But they being to appear in 5's, 10's and 20's a few kilometers beyond Sanand.

On 1.3.84 on our way to Nal Sarovar, we were attracted by a whole mass of white birds flying over a limited area near Goraj village. The sun had not then risen, but in the morning light we could judge that the birds could be storks. Eager as we were regarding the cause of such a big flock flying over a small area, we drove towards the site. A little walking took us to a embankment of the village pond. What we saw there was fantastic. In the drying water of the pond, there was so much fish, that a big congregation of fish eating birds like large egrets, little egrets, painted storks, pond herons and of course the white storks, which were predominating, was attracted there. The number of white storks could easily be 250 to 300. It looked as if a sumptuous feast was laid out for these birds and they had a nice time. One of us (Rajshree Sarabhai) took many coloured photographs of the group.

N.B. (I may here add that during the last four-five years I have seen black storks which formerly was a rare winter visitor) three times in the Saurashtra area. I think that because of the conservation activities in Europe, the number of white storks and black storks has now increased - Lalsinh)

Suggestions for a field guide to the birds of India

A field guide for Indian birds is really a badly felt need. Looking to the speed with which the number of birdwatchers is increasing, it is a high time that a field guide on the pattern of 'A field guide to the birds of Britain and Europe' by Peterson, Montford and Hollom (Collins) is published. Now that we have the ten volumes of Handbook by Salim Ali and Ripley, such a field guide is the only gap which requires to be filled up. Bird watchers in India will surely welcome such a move. But it should be ensured that pictures are really of first class quality.

I would suggest Shri.K.P.Jadav (D/151 Govt.Colony Junction Plot, Rajkot) be contacted as a prospective artist. A few plates by Shri Jadav have been included by Dr.Salim Ali in some of his books including the Handbook. Shri.Ajay M.Desai Desaiwada, Talav Falia Dahod (Panch Mahals) Gujarat could also be approached as a prospective artist for the fieldguide.

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Floating ability of herons by V.Santharam, 68, I floor, Santhome High Road, Madras 600 028: The note 'Pond herons afloat' by Prof.K.K.Neelakantan in the May-June 1986 issue of the Newsletter was most interesting. However, I beg to differ from his statement '....no other member of the heron tribe seems to be capable of alighting on water and floating like a duck....' I have, on quite a few occasions seen grey and night herons afloat at the Vedanthangal bird sanctuary.

I have, so far, noticed the grey heron swimming on three occasions. The first time I saw the grey heron afloat was on 4.3.84. There were a few nests about and incubation was still going on and perhaps the birds had flopped into the water to wet their belly. The other dates on which the grey heron was seen swimming were on 3.10.84 and 2.10.85. The water level had been low and a few others were seen wading in fairly deep waters in quest of food.

My bird diary dated 20.5.84 has the following entry with regard to night herons: 'Seen feeding actively. Apart from catching dead fish, flopping into water, some birds - adults as well as immature - seen swimming like ducks! This was obviously to keep themselves cool. Sometimes they would flap their wings to spray water on their head and back'.

On this occasion, the water level at the tank was at a low level with the advent of summer and there were plenty of dead fish, about 1 1/2 - 2 inches in length, floating on the water surface. Apart from night herons, a few enterprising pond herons were indulging in the 'flop and feed' method. Some grey herons and egrets (mostly little) were seen dipping and catching fish in flight.

These observations seem to indicate that the ability to swim is not restricted to the pond heron alone. A consultation of the 'herons handbook' by James Hancock and James Kushlan (Pub.Croom Helm,London, 1984) throws more light on this subject. I quote the following paragraph from the chapter dealing with feeding behaviour:

'Herons may also launch themselves into the water from perches, either by Diving head first or by Jumping feet first. Green backed herons, pond herons and the great blue heron are all known to use these behaviours. Once in the water, all herons can swim. While Swimming Feeding, a heron floats or swims on the surface of the water stabbing at or picking up prey. The great blue heron, goliath heron, great white egret and black crowned night heron are known to swim with some frequency'.

While on the subject of feeding behaviour of herons, I would like to mention another instance of unusual feeding behaviour of the pond heron. I was observing a few of these herons on the overcast afternoon of 19 October 1982 on an islet of the Adyar river, from the Theosophical Society estates. What attracted my attention was the presence of these herons well away from the water, on the grassy area. Curious, I watched them for a while to find out the reason. I noticed a number of dragonflies flying about, some at a very low height and as I was watching, I found a pond heron stretching out its neck and snap at a dragonfly at which it succeeded! The 'herons Handbook' terms this behaviours as 'Flycatching'.

I would like to have comments and observations from other birdwatchers on this subject.

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Birds in the Monsoon by G.L. Keswani, C-138, Kirti Nagar, New Delhi 110015: On 13 July 1985 I got up early and went for morning walk at about 5.30 am to Satya park (Pandav Nagar) after crossing the railway lines War Kirti Nagar railway station.

For a week or more up to 11th July 1985, there was no rain and even the nights were uncomfortable, as the minimum temperature was not coming down below 31°C. The first good monsoon showers came on 12 July. The temperature on 13 July morning had come down to a comparatively pleasant 27°C. People of Delhi felt a sense of relief from the hot spell.

Even before reaching the park I could see many little brown and ring doves in trees and on electric lines calling, chasing females or doing aerial displays. After going a little further I saw a magpie robin sitting on electric wires and singing very cheerfully. I had not heard such joyful singing earlier.

Many sparrows were sitting in line on electric wires chirping and some were feeding on the road. There were plenty of common mynas in the trees and on electric wires. Many red vented bulbuls were also singing either on electric wires or in trees. A group of blue rock-pigeons were circling in the sky, landing on the roof of a shed of a factory and again flying for a sortic.

Inside the Satya Park a pair of common babblers were hopping and feeding on a path not normally used by visitors. A grey shrike was sitting on a babul tree waiting for its prey.

Above the park a black drongo was chasing a much bigger pariah kite. Though this small bird is known to be courageous, I never knew that it could be so bold as to chase a much bigger kite. No wonder it is called 'Kotwal' or 'Bada-Kauwa' in Hindi.

In the distance I could hear the call Tonk....Tonk... Tonk.. of a copper smith. While returning from the park I could also hear the call Meeow...Meeow of a peacock in the distance. This is the first time I could hear the pea-cock in this area.

On the whole this morning walk proved to be much more rewarding than most of the other days, as far as bird watching is concerned. I noticed that after the

first monsoon showers more birds were seen than on other days and most of them were active and cheerful. It was abundantly clear that these winged friends were also relieved like human beings, from the terrible heat of the Delhi Summer and were welcoming the onset of monsoon. Such activity and cheerfulness in birds is not noticed after rains at other times of the year.

I would like to hear from other readers of this Newsletter about their observations on the subject.

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Flamingoes in Badami Taluk-Karnataka by S.Rangaswami, 'Gopala', 21-E South Avenue Tiruvanmiyur Madras 600041: On August 23, 1982 Mr.S.T.Ramesh, IPS, Supdt. of Police Bijapur, Master Hari Vivek - both, members of our Newsletter fraternity of birdwatchers - and I were going by car along the road abutting the bund of Kandoor Khere a big tank of about 4 sq.km. area, about 10 km. from Badami on the Badami-Pattadakal route. It was about 1 pm then and we found a large number of water birds at various spots in the tank which had lots of dry patches with water not more than one to two feet deep here and there. We could see plenty of little egrets, cattle egrets, dabchicks, large egrets, quite a number of moorhens, a solitary grey heron and a large number of paintails. As we were watching these through our binoculars, much to our delight and surprise, we saw fourteen lesser flamingoes feeding in their characteristic fashion, totally free from disturbance of any kind from human or animals. We watched them for about half an hour and left the place much against our wish to complete the rest of our visit programme which included Pattadakal, Aihole etc. We do not know whether the flamingoes are regular visitors to this area. I suggested to Mr.Ramesh to make enquiries about them during his future official visits to the area and to advise the villagers through his local police staff not to harm the birds which visit the tank since it was teeming with bird life and the birds appeared to feel safe there.

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Ecology of resident ducks in India - A request for information by U.Sridharan, Research Biologist, BNHS Ecological Research Centre, Bharatpur 321 001, Rajasthan: I am currently working on a three year project on the ecology of four species of resident ducks viz. whistling teal, spotbill duck, cotton teal and comb duck at the Keoladeo Ghana National Park in Bharatpur, Rajasthan. I shall feel obliged if readers could furnish me with any bits of information about these little known birds, especially regarding their nesting behaviour. Information concerning the breeding season in various parts of India, courtship rituals, nesting details, food and feeding habits etc. are most welcome, even if the observations are merely incidental ones. The knowledge thus mustered would, I believe, go a long way to get a general idea of the birds in India as a whole, and would also facilitate comparison of the data which I collect in this artificially managed ecosystem. Contributors will be gratefully acknowledged.

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NEWSLETTER QUIZ

(MAY - JUNE 1986)

Mr.J.F. Dodia of
B.A. College of Agriculture
Entomology Department
Gujarat Agricultural University
Anand Campus, Anand 388110

has sent in the first correct answer to the Quiz. The paragraph quoted was from the article 'In Quest Of Coastal Birds' by K.V. Sreenivasan, 1980 NLBW Vol.XX (No.1) Page 3.

QUIZ NO.II - Where was this para: The first correct reply will be rewarded by Rs.20/-

'Rarely will it be seen perching on trees, most of the time it will be on the ground, hopping and flying from boulder to boulder along the gurgling streams and rushing torrents' - Editor.

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आदिवासी क्षेत्रों में छात्रों को दोपहर का मूफ्त भोजन :-

आदिम जाति कल्याण विभाग व्दारा संचालित शालाओं के छात्रों को दिया जा रहा दोपहर का मुफ्त भोजन प्रदेश के सभी आदिवासी इलाकों के स्कुली छात्रों कों देने का निर्णय। इस कार्यक्रम का भाभ चार लाख बच्चों की मिलेगा।

मध्यप्रदेश में हरिजनों और आदिवासियों की भलाई के कार्यक्रमों के लिए सातवों पंचवषीय योजना में छठी योजना की तुलना में दो गुनी राशि का प्रावधान।

आदिम जाति कल्याण के कार्यों में राज्य आयोजना, केन्द्र प्रवर्तित योजना, केंन्द्रीय योजनाओं और विशेष केन्द्रीय सहयाता प्राप्त योजनाओं पर सातवीं पंचवर्षीय योजना में रुपये 160.74 करोड़ का प्रावधान। छठी योजना में इन कार्यो में रूपये 83.26 करोड़ व्यय हुए।

हरिजन विधोषांश योजना के तहत सातवीं योजना में रुपये 413 करोड़ की राशि का प्राबधान। छठी योजना में हरिजन विशेषांश योजना के अन्तंगत लगभग रुपये 185 करोड़ का व्यय हुआ।

सातवीं योजना में प्रदेश कें सभी आदिवासी विकास खडों में एकीकृत बाल विकास कार्यक्रम लागू।

प्रदेश मों पहली बार आदिवासी युवतियों कें लिए नई तकनीकी प्रशिक्षण संस्थाऐं छोलने का निर्णय।

योजनाओं का लाभ गरीबों की झोपडियों तक पहुचाने के प्रकाश्य।

Front Cover: THE MASKED BOOBY (Sula Dactylatra)

Courtesy K. S. HARSHVARDHANA BHAT

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